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ABSTRACT

Clients come to counseling to effect change in their lives, usually because they are in crisis, in conflict, in pain, or blocked in some way. They may come of their own volition, but often they come at the the insistence or authority of someone else, such as a spouse, a judge, a parent, or a parole officer. Most people arrive for therapy expecting the counselor to have a prescription or a magic solution which will change them. Clients are looking for a new authority figure with whom to comply and as a result to remain helpless, or to resist and to remain blocked. Change in the counseling process requires at least three components: care, challenge, and commitment. A nurturing, caring environment and relationship between client and counselor is fundamental for growth to occur. Once this groundwork has been laid, the therapist must motivate clients to change by challenging them to look at and to understand ways in which change is needed. Finally, the counselor must make a commitment to nurture, to challenge, to grow, and to change. (ABL)

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THERE ARE THREE C'S IN COUNSELING:

CARING, CHALLENGE, COMMITMENT

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Running Head: Three C's in Counseling

There are Three C's in Counseling:

Caring, Challenge, Commitment

Clients come to counseling to effect change in their lives, usually because they are in crisis, in conflict, in pain, or blocked in some way. They may come of their own volition, but often they come at the insistance or authority of someone else, a spouse, a judge, a parent, or a parole officer. Most people arrive for therapy expecting the counselor to have a presciption or a magic solution which will change them. In other words they are looking for a new authority figure; someone to either comply with and as a result remain helpless, or to resist and remain blocked. Counselors must avoid falling into this trap.

Some counselors enjoy the role of authority figure. They accept responsibility for solving their clients' problems. They may have a bag full of techniques and strategies and their clients will be impressed at the relief of symptoms, but the true healing process, the building of self esteem, the understanding and transfer of learning, requires the client to take reponsibility for changing and

the counselor to be in the supporting role rather than being the star of the show. This requires hard work and risk for the client and a broad knowledge and skill base for the counselor. There are at least three components of the counseling process: caring, challenge, and commitment.

Care in the Counseling Process

In our society, there are few relationships as risky as is the relationship between counselor and client. The client is expected to disclose his or her innermost thoughts and feelings, to let down any pretenses or protective guards. This requires the counselor to truly care about the client by creating a safe environment and establishing a trusting relationship in which the client will have the courage to risk vulnerability.

Carl Rogers (1957) has stated that empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and congruence are the necessary and sufficient ingredients for client change. Caring is necessary, and is the important first step in the counseling process, but it is often not sufficient to effect change. A warm, safe womb is the place for growth to

begin, but it can become a stifling environment, and it certainly does not reflect the reality of the unsafe, real world in which the client must cope everyday. For many clients, caring is not enough to effect change. They must be challenged in some way.

Challenge in the Counseling Relationship

Changing requires learning new thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. Research has shown that arousal has a curvilinear relationship to learning (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). Too little arousal reduces learning potential and too much arousal blocks learning from occuring. The same is true for therapeutic learning in the counseling process. When a client comes into therapy in a crisis state, there is too much anxiety to develop the understanding necessary to make life changes. At this time the client needs caring until the crisis has been resolved. On the other hand, a client who comes at someone else's insistance, or who is receiving secondary gains from remaining stuck, does not have the motivation to change. The counselor's role is to shake the client up, to unsettle him or her, so that a dissonance is created and any change will be better

than staying stagnant (Festinger, 1957). Many methods have been used effectively to challenge clients.

The Gestalt therapist, Fritz Perls (1973), Rational Emotive Therapist, Albert Ellis (1971), and strategic therapists such as Jay Haley (1963, 1977) have written about the benefits of confrontation and confusion in jarring clients out of their complacencies toward positive change. Once a caring, trusting relationship has been established, the counselor must then find ways to challenge the client to effect change. This often leaves the client in the precarious position of imbalance, of ambivalence, of disorientation. The counselor then must make a commitment to stick with the client through the unsettling process of change.

Counselor Commitment to Client Change

When a client begins to make major changes it often places demands on the therapist for nurturing, for availability, for working through transference and countertranference issues (see Freud, 1915-1917). This can be exhausting and exasperating. These demands require the counselor to change and grow as

well as the client. This involves genuine commitment on the part of the counselor.

Summary

Change in the counseling process requires at least three components, care, challenge and commitment. A nurturing, caring environment and relationship between client and counselor is fundamental for growth to occur. Once this groundwork has been laid, the therapist must motivate the client to change by challenging him or her to look at and understand ways in which change is needed. Finally, the counselor must make a commitment to nurture, to challenge and to grow and change.

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